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The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS

26 The Evil One

Fight to the Finish in the Final Battle

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From a story by Frank Graves

Julek Heller

On the Twenty-Sixth Day . . .

Night arrives with Evil force.
Terror, bloodshed run their course.
Doom awaits on either hand
But victory in sea, on land,
Brings at last the light of day.
Yet do not turn so fast away.
For even in the final scene
All is still not what it seems.

For hours Richard, Orkan and Melek flew through the air on Ravan's back. Suddenly the huge horse tilted his wings and started on the long descent to the Ancestral City. The sky was now black, in an unnatural night that Richard knew could only be caused by the Evil One. Darkness obscured the landscape below but, as they drifted down, he could see a ridge of low hills speckled with campfires ahead.

Beyond the hills, Richard could just make out the towering white battlements and behind them the turrets and towers that led up to the central citadel. Above the city, the sky was strangely bright.

Ravan began to descend. He spread his wings wide and dropped lightly among the trees in the forest outside the city walls. Richard, Orkan and Melek climbed off his back, groaning as life returned to their stiff limbs. The familiar figure of Juroot was waiting for them. The Guardian greeted Richard enthusiastically.

"You have done well," Juroot said, after Richard had quickly told him how they had retrieved the final pod. "Your task is almost done, but the Evil One's forces still hold the city. Not until they are destroyed can the pods be returned to the Tree of Life and the Guardians be reinstated. Only then will our world be secure." Juroot's face was grim. "Come, you will attend our Council of War."

Juroot led the trio through the forest. Everywhere there were columns of soldiers, their faces showing grim determination for the task ahead.

Juroot ushered the three into a large clearing packed with creatures sitting on felled trees or squatting on the ground. Among them, Richard recognized Kika, Zard, Tuska and Oganga.

"Where's Golan?" Richard asked feeling sure the old Guardian would be there to greet him.

"He is with us in spirit," Juroot replied. "Not until we reach the Tree of Life will he show himself."

Council of war

Space was made for the newcomers and then the council began. Arguments flowed back and forth as to the best way of getting into the city. Many favoured a concentrated frontal attack. Others countered that it would be better to tunnel a way under the walls. Everyone had their argument for one or other action.

As the hubbub grew, Juroot stood to his full height and called for quiet.

"A frontal attack would cost too many lives," he said. "There must be a compromise. The dwarf forces will go in ahead and tunnel under the walls. They will give a signal when they are ready to

open the gates. Oganga and his bird forces will create a diversion from above.

"Insect scouts will keep the Guardians informed of enemy activities throughout. The rest of us will divide into four groups and be ready to advance simultaneously when we get the signal."

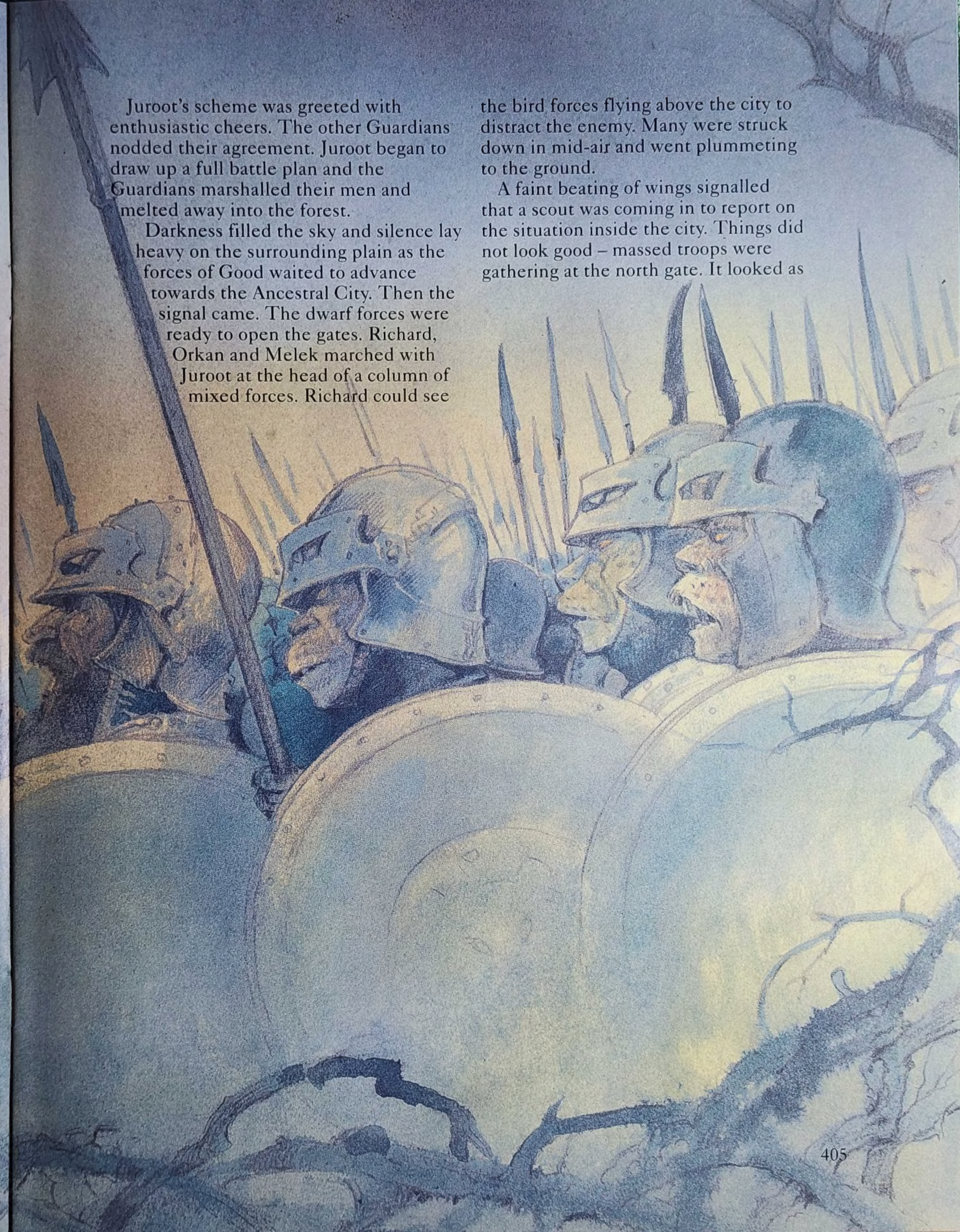
Battle plan

Juroot fell silent and surveyed the assembled throng with piercing eyes, then he went on, "Zard, you take your troops through the west gate, Tuska take the east and Kika the south. Richard, Melek and Orkan will join me and go in through the north gate. Remember the Evil One's forces will be ready for us. Be vigilant and good luck."

Juroot's scheme was greeted with enthusiastic cheers. The other Guardians nodded their agreement. Juroot began to draw up a full battle plan and the Guardians marshalled their men and melted away into the forest.

Darkness filled the sky and silence lay heavy on the surrounding plain as the forces of Good waited to advance towards the Ancestral City. Then the signal came. The dwarf forces were ready to open the gates. Richard, Orkan and Melek marched with Juroot at the head of a column of mixed forces. Richard could see the bird forces flying above the city to distract the enemy. Many were struck down in mid-air and went plummeting to the ground.

A faint beating of wings signalled that a scout was coming in to report on the situation inside the city. Things did not look good – massed troops were gathering at the north gate. It looked as



if they were preparing to move out to attack Juroot's advancing forces.

On hearing the news Juroot urged his troops forward.

Soon the forces of Evil could be seen heaving and jostling through the north gate, joining in a tight spearhead of venom towards Juroot. The torches they carried cast a lurid glow, multiplying the shadows and making their numbers seem even greater than they really were. Hoarse shouts and cries of anguish rose from their midst.

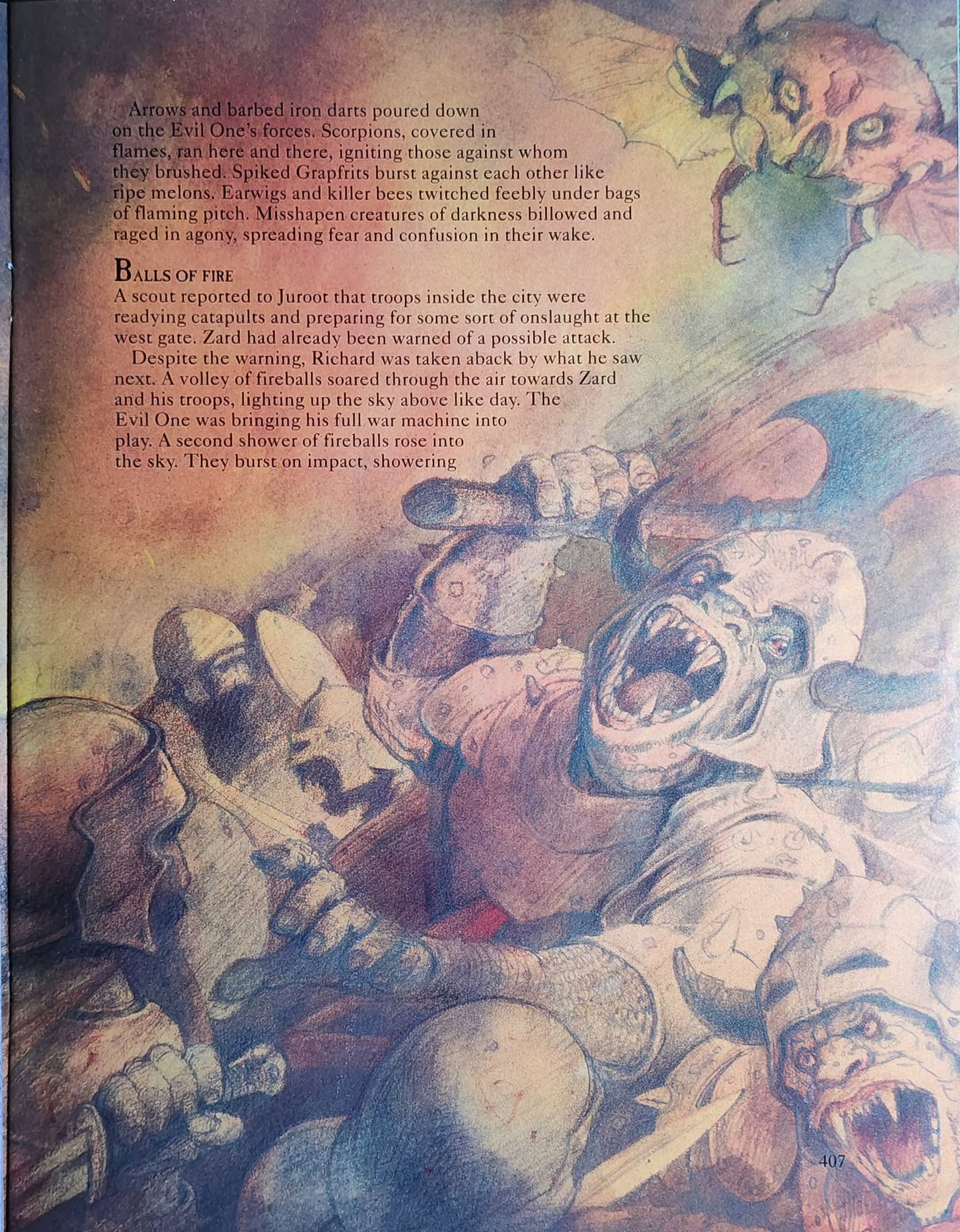
Juroot's men continued to advance in a pincer movement around the oncoming enemy. Faint cries came from the darkness where skirmishing Landsmen had met a group of Cozards. The others took a tighter grip on their weapons and prepared for the onslaught.

Arrows and barbed iron darts poured down on the Evil One's forces. Scorpions, covered in flames, ran here and there, igniting those against whom they brushed. Spiked Grapfrits burst against each other like ripe melons. Earwigs and killer bees twitched feebly under bags of flaming pitch. Misshapen creatures of darkness billowed and raged in agony, spreading fear and confusion in their wake.

Balls of fire

A scout reported to Juroot that troops inside the city were readying catapults and preparing for some sort of onslaught at the west gate. Zard had already been warned of a possible attack.

Despite the warning, Richard was taken aback by what he saw next. A volley of fireballs soared through the air towards Zard and his troops, lighting up the sky above like day. The Evil One was bringing his full war machine into play. A second shower of fireballs rose into the sky. They burst on impact, showering



Zard's advancing troops with a flaming substance that ate through their armour. Screams filled the air.

More fireballs landed amongst Juroot's battling forces. The Evil One was not worried about destroying his own troops along with the forces of Good. Juroot spotted a squadron of Grapfrits buzzing towards them, and urged his troops to advance. Then the signal came.

"The gates are open," Juroot cried.

Ferocious fighting

As planned, the forces of Good surged through the four city gates simultaneously.

When at last Richard entered the city, he saw that it was in worse shape than he had previously thought. Some of the buildings had been reduced to piles of rubble and towers lurched perilously on the point of collapse.

The battle was raging. Scorpions, Cozards, killer bees, giant earwigs and other creatures teemed through the streets. On a staircase to the battlements a group of dwarfs were battling for their lives against a tight formation of Cozards. The dwarfs were no match for the Cozards' brutal defence and fell back in disarray.

A wedge of earwigs advanced towards Zard, their sickle-shaped horns slashing at the air. The Guardian sliced viciously at the enemy with his battleaxe. Green blood spurted heavenwards and the earwigs retreated, scuttling for protection behind a band of scorpions that swept in from a side street.

The fighting was fast and fierce. Juroot had just come under attack by two Cozards when Tuska joined him in the fray.

"The forces of Evil are stronger than I anticipated," Juroot admitted to the Guardian of Mythical Beasts.

Battle at sea

Meanwhile, the forces of Good and Evil were readying for battle underwater. First to strike were Nemis's ghost sailors. They were no match for Doonar's dolphins. The sea mammals launched their bottle noses like battering rams and before long the ghost sailors disappeared completely.

Then came Sumar, dragging herself through the sand with her fearsome talons. In her wake came the giant squid and the stingrays. The forces of Good were driven back by their attack – back into the shallows where Tolosh eagerly awaited them. Tishon and Shunta

urged their forces forward, alert to the trap in which they were now caught.

Suddenly the sea turned an odd shade of pink. The alligators had circled round the Tolosh and were attacking them in turn. Claws ripped along soft bellies, hard tails flailed against fragile skulls. Soon there was nothing left of the Tolosh save clumps of fur that floated seaweed-like over the pinkish-white waves.

Final onslaught

Heartened by this victory, Tishon and Shunta dived straight for Sumar. Before the Moss Beast knew what was happening the two Guardians were at her throat. A swift knife stroke opened her neck to the bone. The squid and stingrays were defenceless prey for Doonar's sea mammals. A few rays made it to shore, only to be devoured by the alligators. The battle at sea was over.

Back at the Ancestral City, the forces of good looked on in jubilation as a geyser of flame erupted, consuming hundreds of evil combatants in its explosion before dying down. When an insect scout brought news of the victory at sea, a rolling cheer swept along the city walls. The Evil One's powers had been drastically weakened by the carnage at sea.

The Guardians and their troops steeled themselves for the final onslaught. The forces of Evil were at a disadvantage now. They had relied on sheer weight of numbers and their position to win the day. In the narrow streets, against the original inhabitants of the city, the tables were turned.

The forces of Good fought their way into houses, up battlements, into secret tunnels. From every window and doorway missiles hurtled into the evil ranks. The fallen piled on top of each other in bloodied heaps. Those at the front tried to turn back but were prevented by the press of those behind.

Funeral pyres

The carnage lasted only moments. The sky was lighter now, but the air still had a dark, grainy quality. The scene of destruction that greeted the eye, beneath a clear, blue sky, was horrific.

In a daze Juroot and his forces picked their way through the bodies and smouldering wreckage, recognizing here and there the mutilated remains of their companions. Then they began the long, slow process of sorting the corpses.

After much hard work the battlefield was cleared, the fires doused and the bodies stacked in two large piles, one for Evil troops another for Good. Juroot strode forward and solemnly lit the two funeral pyres. Twin columns of black smoke rose into the air. Troops lined the walls, watching silently as the flames consumed their comrades. Only when both pyres had died to embers did Juroot speak.

"It's finished," he said wearily. "Our lives can begin again."

Juroot motioned Richard, Orkan and Melek to follow him and led them to a place that Richard recognized at once. In front of

him stood Golan and the Tree of Life. The old Guardian's face wrinkled in delight when he saw Richard.

"Well done!" he beamed. "Your path has been long and dangerous but you have succeeded as I knew you would." He peered deep into Richard's eyes. "You have learned much, too."

As Golan spoke Richard realized just how true this was. He felt stronger, braver, wiser, better able to cope with the unknown. He wondered if it had anything to do with the pods he carried and if his newfound knowledge would disappear when he handed them over.

"Don't worry," Golan read his mind, "the pods have contributed much but their true wealth lies in the manner in which you gained them. The value of that experience will remain with you forever."

A sudden thought struck Richard.

The prophecy fulfilled

"Who was the guide you said would help me? You mentioned only one, but Orkan and Melek were with me all the way."

"Yes," Golan smiled and stretched out a hand for the pods. As he returned them one by one to the Tree of Life, they radiated a warm, golden light.

"I said there would be one to guide you," Golan continued, "but it was neither Orkan nor Melek. Your inner self was your guide."

Richard turned towards Orkan. What he saw left him speechless.

All the Guardians were wearing armour of gold. In their midst, complete with his own golden armour and weapons, was Orkan.

"Armor, Guardian of the Common Beasts, was killed by the Evil One before the Final Battle," Golan explained. "Orkan's destiny was to join the Guardians. He takes Armor's place."

"What about Melek?" Richard asked.

Golan laughed and beckoned with his hand. From behind the Guardians stepped a diminutive figure

dressed in fiery vermilion robes. It took Richard a second to realize that this was the ragged scribe who had accompanied him on his adventures.

"Melek has been made Keeper of the Sacred Runes," Golan said. "As such he will be the leader of his people."

"Say your farewells too," Golan said, "for the time has come for you to return to your own world."

It was hard to believe that it was all over, but suddenly Richard experienced a strong yearning for home. As he said his goodbyes Richard felt that he was losing true friends.

Evil is vanquished

"You have saved our world. You will always be remembered," Golan said, stretching out a hand, "but the amulet must stay in the Ancestral World."

The old man reached forward to retrieve the amulet, which Richard had worn round his neck for luck during the battle. In that instant, the sky turned blinding white and a red flash seared Richard's eyes. Rising from the centre of the city was a towering column of blackness, in which swam two slanted red eyes. For a second the eyes scanned the battlefield with concentrated malevolence. Then they disappeared leaving a faint impression of the Evil One in the sky. Had Evil really been vanquished?

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

The friendly pair are still on the trail despite the horrors of battle. Can you spot them hiding somewhere in the illustrations in this issue?

In issue 25, Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 387.

Power of Evil

Win a 1040ST Atari computer!

Cut out the final letter block. Arrange the 26 letters into the correct phrase to reveal the source of the Evil One's power. Complete the tie-breaker and you could be a winner.

Clue: Look to your issues – the secret phrase is already there!

See Competition Entry Form insert for details.

NB The competition is open to residents of the UK and Eire only.

Life Force Pod

3-Minute Challenge

If you look closely at the illustration on pages 414 and 415, you will see that the pod has been incorporated into the design of some of the armour and clothing. How many pods can you find on Richard, Melek and the Guardians in less than three minutes?

In issue 25, the Life Force Pod was hidden in the top of the tree on page 398.

Monsters and Magic

When you have finished reading about the Evil One and the Final Battle for the Ancestral City, learn about Merlin and the Vampires on Morbane's story cards. Which of the two do you think the Evil One is based on?

In issue 25, Fenrar was based on the Werewolf.

The Ancestral Trail

Cut out the tokens and add them to your pieces for the role-playing game. Be sure to keep them safe for future use.

Puzzle Map

Cut out the final piece and glue in position to complete your Ancestral World puzzle map poster. Pin it to your bedroom wall where you can retrieve it easily to use as a base in the role-playing game.

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In Issue 27

Tengam, Gravity Defier

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The Ancestral Trail

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